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Chairman: Mr. Matute (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Peru)

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In the absence of Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti) Mr. Matute (Peru), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 99: Sustainable development and international economic cooperation (*continued*) (A/C.2/54/L.21)

(c) Women in development (*continued*)

Draft resolution on women in development (A/C.2/54/L.21)

1. **Ms. Critchlow** (Guyana), introducing draft resolution A/C.2/54/L.21 on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, drew particular attention to the tenth preambular paragraph and to paragraphs 2, 5 and 14. She expressed the hope that the Committee would lend its support to the draft resolution.

Agenda item 97: Macroeconomic policy questions (*continued*) (A/C.2/54/L.25)

(a) High-level international intergovernmental consideration of financing for development (*continued*)

Draft resolution on high-level international intergovernmental consideration of financing for development (A/C.2/54/L.25)

2. **Mr. Talbot** (Guyana), introducing draft resolution A/C.2/54/L.25 on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, drew particular attention to paragraphs 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 15. He expressed the hope that the draft resolution would constitute a basis for agreement on further steps to be taken in the high-level international intergovernmental consideration of financing for development.

Agenda item 100: Environment and sustainable development (*continued*)

(b) International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (A/54/497, A/54/136-E/1999/89, A/54/132-E/1999/80, A/54/132/Add.1-E/1999/80/Add.1, A/54/135-E/1999/88; A/C.2/54/4)

3. **Mr. Boulle** (Director, Secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction), introducing the reports of the Secretary-General on International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction: successor arrangements (A/54/497) and international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon (A/54/135), said that the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction had drawn attention to the need for long-term, proactive disaster prevention strategies. However, the cross-sectoral activities involved in disaster reduction required difficult political choices about allocation of resources by Governments. While there was international recognition of the growing economic and social importance of disasters for developing countries, such recognition needed to be converted into Government policy. Over the past decade disasters had cost the world an average of $87 billion a year; however, contributions for disaster reduction had represented only 2 per cent of the total relief aid provided by donor countries.

4. If those trends continued, very soon not even the wealthiest countries in the world would be able to afford the cost of reconstruction of their economies and their social fabric. The only way out was for all countries to reduce their vulnerability to natural hazards by investing in disaster prevention and making disaster reduction an essential element of Government policy. A truly global, interdisciplinary and multisectoral approach needed to be taken to the problem. In that regard, three initiatives had been undertaken within the context of the Decade. The first initiative, the Risk Assessment Tools for Diagnosis of Urban Areas against Seismic Disasters, had been carried out by the secretariat with financial and technical support from the Government of Japan. The second initiative related to improved early warning capacities for natural and environmental disasters, while the third initiative related to the international community's efforts to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon.

5. The report contained in document A/54/135 provided ample insight into the opportunities for realizing effective disaster reduction in relation to El Niño and La Niña, given the available scientific knowledge and technology accumulated around the world in many sectors. In that regard, the first intergovernmental seminar on the 1997/98 El Niño event had been held in Guayaquil, Ecuador, in November 1998. The Declaration of Guayaquil, adopted at the end of the seminar, had called upon the United Nations to assess the feasibility of establishing an international centre for the research of the El Niño phenomenon. Unfortunately, international financing in that regard was not forthcoming. Yet, the investment needed for such a centre was very small when compared to the likely damage of the next El Niño.

6. The main objective of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction was to enable communities to become resilient to natural hazards and to proceed from an approach of protection against hazards to one of risk management. It was structured around four main themes for action, namely, public awareness approaches; community and public

commitment; the establishment of disaster resilient communities; and the reduction of socio-economic losses from disasters. The goals of the inter-agency task force for disaster reduction would be to devise strategies and policies for the reduction of natural hazards; identify gaps in existing policies and programmes; ensure complementarity of action by agencies; provide policy guidance to the Secretariat and convene ad hoc meetings of experts on disaster reduction-related issues. It was vital to ensure that the task force covered all members of the global disaster reduction constituencies, including organizations of the United Nations system, members of civil society, in particular from the scientific community, and regional representatives.

7. **Ms. Critchlow** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that 90 per cent of disaster victims lived in developing countries. A single natural disaster could eliminate years of economic growth and result in tremendous human loss and suffering. Natural disasters were striking with increasing frequency and severity, yet the contribution of the international community to emergency aid funds had decreased significantly in comparison to previous decades. The effects of natural disasters could be mitigated through a proactive and concerted approach with the involvement of all sectors in planning, preparedness, prevention, relief and rehabilitation. More importantly, that issue should be treated by the international community in the context of sustainable development rather than as a humanitarian concern. The Group of 77 and China therefore fully supported the Secretary-General's view that insufficient investment in disaster reduction led to much higher costs for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction.

8. Governments of developing countries had been making efforts at the national level to implement the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action. Some States had even established International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction committees or focal points. However, those programmes were being implemented with very limited financial resources. She therefore urged the international community to increase its financial assistance to natural disaster reduction programmes.

9. The Group of 77 and China endorsed the Secretary-General's recommendation for the establishment of an inter-agency secretariat on natural disaster reduction by 1 January 2000. It also urged the international community to increase its financial contributions to the Natural Disaster Reduction Trust Fund and further develop and transfer technology to developing countries with respect to disaster reduction. The Secretary-General should also take all the action necessary for the establishment of the international centre for research of the El Niño Phenomenon in Ecuador.

10. The Decade had helped to highlight the fact that preventive action could reduce the devastation caused by natural disaster. The challenge now facing the international community was how to intensify its action to reduce the effects of natural disasters and thereby help already vulnerable developing economies to achieve sustainable development.

11. **Ms. Päivöke** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, as well as Cyprus and Malta, said the European Union agreed with the main goals for the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and agreed with the Secretary-General that the Strategy should serve as a platform for cooperation for cost-efficient and complementary efforts in disaster prevention and mitigation. The successor arrangements to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) should remain under the direct authority of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

12. Establishing the proposed task force for disaster reduction would not be easy, given the need to take into account existing and emerging inter-agency platforms, such as the Environment Management Group. The successor to IDNDR must be able to develop and foster the synergies created during the Decade and maintain the high priority given to that issue in the economic and social fields as a whole. The successful functioning of the task force was key to the implementation of natural disaster strategy for the twenty-first century.

13. The European Union supported the Secretary General's proposals for the secretariat of the International Strategy and agreed that the new arrangement should be reviewed at the next session of the General Assembly. Finally, it welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the El Niño phenomenon; a better understanding of that phenomenon would enable better preparation and mitigation of its hazardous effects.

14. **Mr. Farrar** (United States of America) said that, as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction came to a close, his Government commended all who had worked together to increase worldwide awareness of the importance of natural disaster mitigation and reduction in saving lives and property. As a result of the Decade, the international community was more aware that natural disasters were a major threat to social and economic stability and that disaster prevention was the main long-term solution to that threat.

15. The primary objective of the follow-up to the Decade should be to implement the priorities recognized during the Decade in practical ways. His delegation was pleased that the Economic and Social Council had recognized the vital role of natural disaster reduction in sustainable development strategies. It also expressed gratitude to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNDP for their cooperation in the Global Disaster Information Network initiative.

16. The growing impact of natural disasters demonstrated the need to advance mitigation efforts in the areas of hazard mitigation science and technology, education and training, monitoring and early warning and promoting mitigation as an integral part of economic development.

17. A measure of the progress of civilization in the next millennium would be the degree to which the world community used science and technology to improve the quality of life of people everywhere. Addressing the scourge of natural disasters which had afflicted humanity for countless generations was a worthy goal for a new era.

18. **Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) noted with satisfaction the progress achieved in strengthening national capacity in early warning, damage assessment and mitigation, scientific and applied research, and dissemination of technical information. The contribution of the Scientific and Technical Committee, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNDP, UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) had also been considerable.

19. In recent years an increase in large-scale natural disasters had been witnessed, and human and material losses had grown considerably. In 1998 alone, over 50,000 people had died as a result of natural disasters, and the economic damage had been enormous. Bearing that in mind, his delegation believed that it was necessary to continue United Nations activities in that area after 2001, to place greater emphasis on prevention and reduction of natural disasters and environmental catastrophes as an indispensable component of sustainable development strategies, and to assist in strengthening national capacities. There was a growing need to involve new technologies, an to that end, the international community must exchange experience, information, research and training and involve national emergency response agencies.

20. **Mr. Escanero** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the experience gained during the Decade had highlighted the urgent need to move from a reactive approach to an integrated strategy for facing natural disasters, with a greater emphasis on prevention. Accordingly, the members of the Rio Group were working on the regional level to formulate specific proposals for action in the areas of prevention, early warning, mitigation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. They had also joined with the European Union in a programme aimed at enhancing the capacity of the most vulnerable countries to confront disasters.

21. The General Assembly must ensure that earlier resolutions and the resolutions adopted at the recent session of the Economic and Social Council were implemented so that those valuable initiatives in natural disaster reduction would continue. The Rio Group attached great importance to the establishment of an international centre for research into the El Niño phenomenon. The United Nations should continue to play a crucial role in dealing with natural disasters by providing guidelines and coordination between national disaster prevention and mitigation agencies.

22. **Mr. Kolby** (Norway) said that natural disasters had the most devastating effects on developing countries, which had weak infrastructures, and which lacked the capital needed for reconstruction and rehabilitation. Although disasters had traditionally been referred to as "acts of God", the Decade had raised awareness of the possible connections between environmental degradation caused by human activity and such events; further research might show that the term "natural disaster" was a misnomer. While contingency planning and early warning were crucial for short-term prevention, in the long term, sustainable development could have a real impact on disaster prevention.

23. One of the most important lessons learned from the Decade was that coordination among all actors was essential, both in emergency response and in planning for prevention. Governments carried the prime responsibility, but the best results could be achieved only if the international community formed a partnership at all levels. The Decade had also helped to put prevention and early warning on national and international political agendas and had created a culture of prevention in many countries. New and more widely available technology could alter the nature of disaster reduction and life-saving advances in monitoring, analysis and communication should be pursued.

24. Norway supported the proposed successor arrangement to the Decade. While designated agencies should exercise their individual responsibilities for implementation, policy development and coordination must rest in a collective inter-agency authority. His delegation therefore supported the idea of establishing an inter-agency secretariat for disaster reduction within the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; it also supported the establishment of

an inter-agency task force to provide policy guidance and facilitate dialogue.

25. The people most vulnerable to natural disasters were the poor, who had limited means to avoid losses. Without greater attention from policy makers and more support for disaster prevention, many developing countries would not be able to overcome disaster situations. The Decade had enhanced understanding of the measures needed to mitigate the consequences of natural disasters. The current challenge was to translate the lessons learned into political and economic commitments.

26. **Mr. Rafiqul Haque** (Bangladesh) said that there was a growing effort to move from accepting disasters as inevitable natural phenomena to finding ways that human and technological intervention could minimize losses. Insufficient investment in disaster preparedness led to higher costs for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction, and therefore, disaster prevention was more cost-effective than response.

27. Tangible gains from the Decade included making policy support a priority, better threat assessment, better integration of disaster mitigation in overall development strategy, more information on natural hazards, and improved education on disaster reduction. Another important accomplishment was the increased awareness of the value of prevention. A large part of losses from disasters were indirect, in the form of interruption in economic activity, joblessness and lowered productivity.

28. His delegation believed that the momentum generated by the Decade must be maintained. It supported the Secretary-General's recommendation for a mechanism to coordinate inter-agency planning and implementation in natural disaster reduction, and agreed that disaster prevention should be linked to the conclusions of the global conferences of the 1990s. Finally, there should be sufficient resource commitments from development partners to reap the full benefits of the wisdom gained during the Decade.

29. **Mr. Aleman** (Ecuador) said that, while natural disasters affected rich and poor countries alike, developing countries suffered more from the long-term consequences of such events. Ecuador, for example, was attempting to recover years of lost economic growth resulting from the impact of El Niño.

30. During the next millennium, the United Nations should continue to serve as the central forum for discussion of the universal problem of natural disasters and preparation of comprehensive policies and multisectoral strategies linked to targets for economic growth and sustainable development. His delegation endorsed the proposals contained in Economic and Social Council resolution 1999/63, in particular the ones regarding the establishment of an inter-institutional mechanism within the United Nations system for natural disaster reduction and the continuation of the functions of the IDNDR secretariat.

31. Ecuador was very satisfied with the way the El Niño phenomenon was being dealt with within the United Nations system and with the advances that had been made in scientific understanding of the phenomenon. The first Meeting of Intergovernmental Experts on El Niño held at Guayaquil, Ecuador, had, *inter alia*, called for immediate action to assess the feasibility of establishing an international centre for the research of the El Niño phenomenon; that study had been conducted by WMO and the Government of Ecuador and it would be distributed during the current session as an official document. The international centre would work in close collaboration with regional and global centres to improve predictability and mitigate the negative impacts of El Niño, as well as to provide the international scientific community with all available information. Its budget would receive contributions from the Government of Ecuador as well as from the international community. Ecuador hoped that the United Nations and the international community in general would support the establishment of the centre.

32. The Group of 77 and China would be presenting the text of a draft resolution on follow-up to implementation of General Assembly resolutions 52/200 and 53/185 and of resolution 1999/46 of the Economic and Social Council. Ecuador hoped that the draft resolution would be approved by consensus.

33. **Mr. Staehelin** (Observer for Switzerland) said that the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction had helped to measure the impact of disasters in terms of loss of life and human suffering, and the considerable cost of responding to disasters and emergency situations. It had also served to broaden awareness of the need to set in place Government measures. Switzerland attached great importance to the continuation of the work that had been done during the Decade. At the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council held in July 1999 Switzerland had stated that an effective coordination mechanism to promote the management of natural disasters should be established within the United Nations system as of the year 2000. Such a structure should take account of the national and international dimensions of natural disasters. The desire had been expressed that the mechanism should function as a centre of expertise and an inter-organizational focal point, and should not have operational responsibility.

34. His delegation had played an active part in the debates within the Economic and Social Council, and had co-sponsored the resolution that was adopted unanimously. The objectives set out in the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/497) covered most of Switzerland's concerns, but as far as the composition of the inter-agency task force was concerned Switzerland considered that the appointment of representatives of civil society should be undertaken by the scientific community of their respective countries and not by the former Scientific and Technical Committee. Furthermore, the composition of the Secretariat should take greater account of the diversity of the Members of the United Nations.

35. **Mr. Lewis** (Antigua and Barbuda), speaking on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) said that the island nations of the Caribbean were experiencing some of the worst storm seasons in history, and that member nations in other regions had not been spared either. In many island nations storm insurance costs were prohibitively high, and in some, insurance against natural disasters was simply not available. Natural disasters were of concern to all countries, but caused particular uneasiness in small island developing States whose size, isolation, narrow resource base and dependence on vulnerable sectors such as agriculture and tourism left them severely exposed. It was imperative for island nations to avoid or reduce the impact of natural disasters, and they had therefore been very appreciative of the work done under the auspices of the Decade, which had done much to raise awareness and build a culture of prevention.

36. The member countries of AOSIS believed that an immediate requirement was to determine what preventive actions might be available, especially for the most vulnerable and disaster-prone nations. Advanced early warning systems using data derived from satellite sources and disseminated over the Internet were essential. It was also important to make greater efforts to establish contingency planning and other preparedness measures. In all such activities, cooperation at a national, regional and international levels was vital.

37. **Mr. Öztürk** (Turkey) said that it was the seriousness with which disaster mitigation was approached that determined the extent of human and economic loss and damage. Disaster mitigation was the wide range of interconnected activities which, when integrated into all aspects of a society's development, collectively reduced that society's vulnerability. Those aspects ranged from building codes to nation-wide contingency plans. Just as important as having reliable building codes was the effectiveness of the laws enforcing them and the stringency with which those laws were applied.

38. In 1999, hurricanes, cyclones, floods and earthquakes had claimed thousands of lives and caused billions of dollars of damage in Turkey, Greece, Mexico and Taiwan. Turkey itself and the world at large had learned much in recent years about disaster reduction. The earthquake which had struck Turkey that past summer had revealed serious inadequacies in the country's level of preparedness. No matter what that level of preparedness, it would have been difficult to cope with an earthquake of such magnitude and duration in such a densely populated area; however, there was no doubt but that had building codes been implemented more strictly and emergency plans been better articulated, the consequences would have been less dire.

39. Turkey was grateful to the United Nations system, and to the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as to individual countries and other organizations which had helped. The United Nations must continue to offer both organizational and material support to Member States. Turkey was pleased to have received so much support for the Turkish-Greek draft resolution on cooperation in establishing a joint emergency response capability to complement the humanitarian and emergency response systems of the United Nations.

40. **Mr. Valdivieso** (Colombia) said that after suffering many natural disasters, Colombia had adopted a permanent strategy of prevention: it had had a national system for preventing and dealing with disasters since 1988, and in 1997 had adopted a national plan containing policies, actions and programmes as well as financial, educational and research aspects. Colombia had also increased its cooperation with other countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

41. Turning to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, he said that resolution 1999/63 of the Economic and Social Council represented the basic framework for the Second Committee. Natural disaster reduction should continue to figure under consideration of issues relating to environment and sustainable development. It should be an integral part of the sustainable development strategies designed by the United Nations and by other international organizations. The relationship between the two was evident: if more money was invested in prevention, less would have to be paid in humanitarian assistance and reconstruction and there would be that much more available for sustainable development policies.

42. The United Nations should be given the necessary impetus to continue with its work through the definition of clear guidelines. Colombia supported the establishment of

an inter-agency task force to work on a permanent basis on matters related to natural disaster reduction in cooperation with regional representatives and members of the scientific and technical community. Given the complexity of natural phenomena, his Government wished to emphasize the need to strengthen the culture of prevention and early warning through the development and transfer of technology, as well as through better education, professional training and public information. In order to strengthen the national capacities of all countries, especially developing countries, to respond effectively to the negative impacts of the El Niño phenomenon, it was necessary to increase technical and financial assistance, and to strengthen the relationship between international organizations and the various agencies of the United Nations system in order to improve knowledge about and control of the El Niño phenomenon.

43. **Mr. Kasemsarn** (Thailand) said that the Decade had done much to heighten public awareness of the risks of natural disasters and the need for concerted efforts to lessen their impact and that scientific and technological advances had markedly increased the capacities of early warning systems. It was therefore vital to sustain the progress generated by the Decade through the creation of an Inter-agency Secretariat and Task Force.

44. His Government had established a natural disaster reduction programme with a focusing on flood control projects and water resource development. Because disasters, whether natural or man-made, entailed social disruption and environmental degradation, Thailand's disaster prevention strategies had been incorporated into the country's current five-year economic and social development plan. The national strategy involved training volunteers, disseminating information through the media, incorporating the issue into school curriculums and promoting the participation of local authorities and communities.

45. At the regional level, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) had organized a regional workshop on flood control and management and, in cooperation with the IDNDR Action Plan 1988-1999, had held a regional meeting on Risk Reduction and Society in the Twenty-first Century in Bangkok in February 1999. The Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre at the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok provided many Asian countries with assistance in capacity-building for natural disaster management and relief planning.

46. Lastly, at the international level, Thailand would be among the sponsors of the draft resolution on emergency response to disasters. Despite its limited financial resources, the Government had allocated a small portion of its annual budget to humanitarian assistance, in cash or in kind, for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of countries and territories affected by natural disasters.

47. **Mr. Don Nanjira** (World Meteorological Organization (WMO)) said that the debate had emphasized two fundamental imperatives. One was the prevention of natural disasters, together with the elements of prediction, monitoring, early warning and preparedness, and the other was ownership of natural disaster reduction measures by the most vulnerable strata of society. Empowerment of local populations and local communities to deal competently with natural disasters was one of the most effective tools by which loss of life, damage to property and destruction of national economies would be reduced. In the post-Decade era, encouragement should be given to raising public awareness of natural disaster prevention and mitigation by utilizing local communities and their own structures, as well as to increased observance of the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction and the fullest use of scientific and technical expertise in disaster reduction.

48. The commitment of the WMO's to natural disaster mitigation and prevention was clear. It played an active role in international efforts to reduce and prevent the negative effects of natural disasters, three quarters of which were related to climate and the weather. Its action had included capacity-building through training, seminars and education for disaster-prone countries, institutions and peoples; activities to promote public awareness of the importance of disaster prevention; the adoption of a plan of action for the Decade; and the implementation of General Assembly resolutions and resolutions of the Economic and Social Council on natural disaster reduction. It would continue to undertake natural reduction activities in member States and to collaborate with other bodies within and outside the United Nations system in the provision of tropical cyclone forecasting and warning services to the public, assisting national meteorological and hydrological services in performing their roles in disaster reduction and prevention; and maintaining close cooperation with the Decade secretariat.

49. **Ms. Durrant** (Jamaica) said that one of the major achievements of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction had been the replacement of the traditional piecemeal approach to natural disasters by an integrated approach involving better contingency planning, improved risk assessment and loss estimation and a community-based participatory approach to natural disaster reduction.

50. As the Secretary-General had noted in his report on the work of the Organization, 1998 had been the worst year on record for weather-related natural disasters (A/54/1, para. 2). The rebuilding of economies and infrastructures had set many countries back by decades in their development efforts. Small island States were particularly vulnerable because of their size and the fact that many of them were dependent on a single crop or industry. She therefore welcomed Economic and Social Council resolution 1999/63 and hoped that the resolution adopted by the General Assembly at its current session would extend the role of the Decade into the twenty-first century. The successor arrangements were a recognition of the need to ensure that disaster preparedness, reduction and awareness were integrated into the sustainable development strategies of the United Nations and other international organizations.

51. Her delegation supported the establishment of an inter-agency task force and was pleased that the existing inter-agency secretariat function would be maintained; she hoped that the Trust Fund for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction would receive the contributions needed for the secretariat to work effectively. As the Secretary-General had noted, the world had experienced three times as many great natural disasters in the 1990s as in the 1960s; while emergency aid funds had declined by 40 per cent in the past five years alone (A/54/1, para. 4). The provision of resources in that critical area was one way of promoting long-term sustainability by equipping developing countries to deal with the effects of natural disasters.

52. The objectives of advocacy, policy development and coordination established in the IDNDR action plan 1998-1999 had been useful, particularly at the regional level. The Quarterly Magazine, STOP Disasters, the newsletter IDNDR Informs, the IDNDR Web site (http://www.idndr.org) and the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction had increased public awareness of natural disasters. In particular, the Caribbean countries had benefited from seminars offered by the Government of France and by the IDNDR secretariat. The close cooperation between IDNDR and the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Relief Agency had also contributed to the region's efforts to address disaster reduction.

53. As a small island developing State, Jamaica had suffered from natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes. Its efforts to address those problems had been based on the realization that losses could have been reduced through optimum use of available technology and scientific data, rigidly enforced engineering standards and better vulnerability assessment at the community and national levels. Her Government had long since launched an integrated mitigation programme focusing, *inter alia*, on flood mapping, automated and community flood warnings and public education.

54. The United Nations system should continue to play a leadership role in disaster reduction, particularly by promoting dialogue between the developed and developing countries, raising political awareness of the impact of disasters on development and facilitating critical contact with the insurance industry, the World Bank and other development banks. Further progress would require Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations to create a global coalition in order fully to address the impact of natural disasters. Her delegation therefore endorsed the strategy, "A safer World in the Twenty-first Century: Risk and Disaster Reduction".

55. **Mr. Alfeld** (South Africa) said that although South Africa was a relative newcomer to the field of disaster relief, it was wholeheartedly committed to the aims and objectives of the Decade. Two years previously, his Government had initiated a disaster management policy review process that had resulted in new legislation, to be promulgated in early 2000, which would change its current reactive approach to one based on vulnerability reduction, mitigation and preparedness.

56. The Decade had established a solid foundation for a multisectoral, interdisciplinary approach to natural disaster reduction. However advocacy and capacity-building efforts had had less impact in Africa than in some other regions. While some African countries had succeeded in developing disaster reduction policies and strategies, as reflected in the various national assessments carried out at the end of the Decade, much remained to be done. Regional mechanisms for coordination, cooperation, information exchange, advocacy and training — not necessarily in the form of regional centres — were urgently needed. He hoped that the successor arrangements would speed up consultations in that regard and that symposium would be held in order to develop a concrete African plan of action and to develop realistic policies for strengthened capacities at the local, national, subregional and regional levels.

57. His delegation fully supported Economic and Social Council resolution 1999/63 and considered that the successor arrangements must build on the momentum and institutional capacity of IDNDR in order to ensure a swift transition to the proposed international Strategy for Disaster Reduction without threatening the hard-won gains of the developing world. In order for the proposed inter-agency secretariat and task force to maintain the multidisciplinary, intersectoral character of the current secretariat, they should be

established under the direct authority of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and should exist in distinct, independent entities. His delegation particularly welcomed the provision for the establishment of the two bodies on a temporary basis so that States and stakeholders could reflect on the evolving nature of disaster reduction and make any institutional changes required.

58. His delegation endorsed the Secretary-General's call for a culture of prevention and for the removal of institutional barriers to building the cross-cultural cooperation required for successful disaster prevention. The proposed International Strategy for Disaster Reduction was one example of that approach and deserved the fullest support of all stakeholders.

59. The expertise and technology needed to significantly reduce the risks posed by natural disasters existed; what was needed was the political will to transform that knowledge into effective action that would reduce risk at the level of the poorest, most vulnerable communities. His Government pledged to assist in that endeavour.

60. **Mr. Ortega Urbina** (Nicaragua) said that Nicaragua was the Central American country most vulnerable to natural disasters, including earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, torrential rains and volcanic eruptions. Those disasters resulted in loss of life, and caused considerable damage to crops and livestock, the basis of the country's economy, in 1998, for example, Hurricane Mitch had wiped out years of productive and social infrastructure development. His Government therefore endorsed the conclusions drawn from the 1994 World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, particularly with respect to the link between disaster prevention and reduction and sustainable development.

61. Despite its limited resources, his Government was endeavouring to address such situations through the national civil defence committee, which included representatives of various sectors of society. Countries such as his own urgently needed modern technology for capacity-building and for the establishment of an early warning system. He therefore welcomed the fact that the Declaration of the International Systems for the Reduction of Natural Disasters Conference on Early Warning, held in Potsdam in September 1998, included a recommendation for the preparation of an action plan and specific guidelines for an integrated, multisectoral process involving, *inter alia*, sociologists, economists, politicians and scientific and technical organizations. However, that could not be done without the cooperation of the countries which possessed the necessary technologies. International assistance was also needed in order to develop public education programmes and natural disaster simulations.

62. Lastly, he thanked the United Nations and the donor community for the natural disaster relief and other assistance that they had provided to his country.

63. **Mr. Taddei** (San Marino) said that just as most natural disasters were, in fact, the result of human activity, human intervention could do much to prevent or mitigate their effects; it was time to move from a culture of reaction to one of prevention, through a clear assessment of the causes of natural disasters, taking into account the consequences of climate change, and a holistic approach involving not only disaster reduction strategies, but also poverty alleviation and social and economic development.

64. Her delegation agreed with the International Committee of the Red Cross that effective prevention strategies should assess vulnerability and prepare for future disasters in those areas; link national and international preparedness programmes; address the problem proactively rather than reactively. Also of interest were the approach adopted by UNDP; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) efforts to create a culture of disaster prevention; the Geneva Mandate on Disaster Reduction and the strategy "A Safer world in the 21st century: risk and disaster reduction"; and the agreement on regional cooperation on natural disasters that had been signed at the recent summit of the Association of Caribbean States in April 1999.

65. His delegation also supported the Mexican proposal for the preparation of national listings of civil protection organizations, updated inventories of available resources and handbooks on the effective management of international cooperation, which was an essential component of disaster response. In that regard, the European Centre for Disaster Medicine in San Marino, had organized forums, panels, meetings and discussions on the topic of natural disaster prevention, relief and mitigation.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.